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SUBJECT: HUNGARY'S ELECTIONS: ROUND ONE (C-RE6-00145)

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The First Round: What's at Stake?

11. (U) The first round of Hungary's two round system on April 9 will determine which parties will be represented in Parliament for the next four years. Currently, there are four parliamentary parties: the governing MSZP (Socialist) party, its junior coalition partner SZDSZ (the Free Democrats), the chief opposition party FIDESZ, and opposition party MDF (Hungarian Democratic Forum). MSZP and FIDESZ are certain to poll more than the five percent of popular votes necessary to remain in Parliament. All polls suggest that it is unlikely that the MDF will remain represented, although the strong performance of MDF President Ibolya David in the April 6 four-party debates has given some in the party cause for (faint) optimism. It is impossible at this juncture to determine the fate of the keystone party SZDSZ. All polls show it hovering near five percent, but margins of error and uncertainty about voter turnout make observers here reluctant to predict the party's future.

12. (U) If SZDSZ wins more than five percent of the vote, the received wisdom here is that it will be much more difficult, but not impossible, for FIDESZ to win the election. As was the case in 2002, SZDSZ's five-plus percent share of the polls would be added to incipient coalition partner MSZP's for a number that would likely exceed any number that FIDESZ could be expected to muster. Conversely, an SZDSZ tally of just under five percent would likely come at the expense of the governing MSZP, thus decreasing its chances for re-election. A stronger than expected showing by Hungary's "fourth" party, MDF, would generally be thought here to come at the expense of FIDESZ.

13. (U) Although the party list outcomes are important, the 176 individual mandate races might be key to the election, and their final tally will not be known until after the April 23 second round. Observers, citing the increased dominance of the two leading parties and (often inaccurate) individual race polling, expect a much larger number of these races to be decided in the first round. In 2002, forty-five races were decided in round one and some pollsters are predicting that as many as 80 could be won on April 9. Even if that were the case, it would leave more than half the contests to round two, and the intervening two weeks allow much time for horsetrading among the competing parties.

14. (SBU) Bottom line: we will be able, after the first round of the election April 9, to say with certainty only which parties will be represented in Parliament for the next four years. It is extremely unlikely that the election results will be decisive enough to allow a winner to be forecast with any degree of certainty.

15. (U) Visit Embassy Budapest's classified website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/budapest/index.cfm
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